SOME SCHOLASTIC ELEMENTS IN *PARADISE LOST*

BY

ALFRED HENRY DEUTSCH

A.B., St. John's University, Minn., 1936
A.M., University of Illinois, 1942

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
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SOME SCHOLASTIC ELEMENTS IN *PARADISE LOST*

During the last two decades Milton scholarship has largely been seeking the sources which Milton adapted for his creation of *Paradise Lost*. An almost inexhaustible catalogue of sources has already been compiled, the majority of them from patrology and Renaissance literature. Source material has been found in St. Augustine, Lactantius, Du Bartas, Vondel, and the Rabbinical commentators on Scripture. There has also been the attempt to find much of Milton's theology in the Reformation writers, notably Ames and Wolleb.

I have shown that very many of these source studies are too narrow in scope, for they ignore one of the most powerful influences at work in the era of Milton's composition of the *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost*: the writings of the Scholastics. The theology of the Schoolmen had been banned from the Universities a century before Milton matriculated at Cambridge; yet its influence continued to exert itself throughout the seventeenth century, not only in the writings of the theologians, but also in the literary creations of the Renaissance. For example, the theological systems of Ames, Wolleb, Zanchius, Calvin, Melancthon, to name a few, were thoroughly impregnated with Scholasticism, both in the arrangement of materials as well as in terminology. All these writers were well acquainted with the system of the Scholastic theologians, as it was crystallized in the *Summa* of St. Thomas.

Milton was no exception. By his own admission he spent considerable time poring over systems of theology. In these systems was contained a profusion of speculation on every subject conceivable to man's limited mind. It is no surprise, therefore, to find innumerable similarities between ideas expressed in *Paradise Lost* and those in the *Summae* of Aquinas and St. Bonaventure.

Milton nowhere expresses any indebtedness to the Scholastics. In fact, some of the vituperation he directed against the Schoolmen lends the impression that he scorned their writings. But reconstruction of his school background, which I have very briefly sketched, proves conclusively, even without his admission, that Milton owed much to the great Scholastics.

I have not concerned myself much with the *De Doctrina*, except in cases where it has been necessary for an elucidation of ideas conveyed in *Paradise Lost*.

Any system of theology begins with the proofs of God's existence, proceeds to His nature, and then analyzes as far as is humanly possible the mystery of the divine Trinity. I have begun in the same fashion, mentioning the similarity between the proofs for God's existence as advanced by Aquinas and by Milton. I have expended no energy in seeking sources for Milton's concept of God, for his God is the God of the Old Testament literature, a fact quite universally admitted. However, I have delved into the question of divine Filiation more thoroughly because of Milton's peculiar conception of Christ. Although I am aware that the Roman Catholic Church had once placed *Paradise Lost* on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* because of a "suspicion of heresy," I am safe in asserting that everything in *Paradise Lost* regarding the Son of God is capable of orthodox interpretation. But the *De Doctrina* is frankly heretical. In the chapter on "The Son of God," Milton not only admits Arianism, but also implies an acceptance of Nestorianism and Monothelitism. The reason for this is that Milton's age foundered on a few very crucial terms, which had been confused in the Patristic age and subsequently defined by Church councils—substance, subsistence, hypostasis, and person. I have offered as an explanation for this confusion the fact that Milton adhered to Ramistic logic rather than Aristotelian, the former of which admittedly belittles the necessity of distinction.

Christ of *Paradise Lost* is the mediator between God and man. In Milton's elaboration of this theme, he follows the doctrine of St. Paul and the systematization of it as outlined in the Scholastic theologians. On the subject of the exaltation of Christ, however, Milton leans more heavily on the Church Fathers. In *Paradise Lost* there is a double account of the exaltation of Christ, one of them occurring in Book V, when God declares the Sonship of Christ and His dominion over all creatures. The second occurs in Book III, after—to use an expression indicating temporality—the revolt in heaven. The first of these two is assigned as the motive of Lucifer's rebellion. Milton found this idea in the *Divinae Institutiones* of Lactantius.

The Holy Spirit in *Paradise Lost* is a rather indefinable Person. At times Milton seems to confuse Him with the muse of pagan epic poetry. On the whole, however, He is the Spirit who was present at Creation and vivified all matter, and who continues

to give vitality to all living beings.

The next important division of theology treats the external efficiency of God, the *opera ad extra.* Divine decrees is one subdivision of this tract. I have chosen one phase of this matter, on predestination, because it is such an integral part of *Paradise Lost* and because it has aroused so much discussion among Milton scholars. I have not been able to side with those who profess that in *Paradise Lost* Milton is Arminian. He certainly is not Calvinist, nor is he a Thomist. The advocates of Milton's Arminianism are fully correct until they touch the doctrine of reprobation. But even Arminianism, as I have shown, makes reprobation the result of a divine decree, though a conditional one. Milton approximates the Thomist school of theology on this point. Regarding predestination, however, Milton leans toward the Jesuit theology. Arminianism itself is very close to the Jesuit theology on this matter, and Arminius was once suspected of having fallen under its influence; Milton accepted that suspicion. The reasons for Milton's rejection of Arminianism were possibly political; Laud and all the Bishops, whom Milton thoroughly detested, were disciples of Arminius.

After the tract on divine decrees, theologians then consider the creation of angels and men. It is difficult to decide categorically from what sources Milton extracted the material on angels which he incorporated into *Paradise Lost.* Theological tracts on angels were common in the seventeenth century and earlier; literary use of material on the angels, such as Heywood's *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels,* were not at all unusual. From any or all these Milton may have drawn. On the other hand, all these were in turn indebted to the Scholastics, who had woven into their *Summae* the speculations of former ages, especially of the Patristic age. This phase of the dissertation brings to notice a certain peculiarity of Milton. A comparative study of the *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost* bears witness to the fact that in the *De Doctrina,* which is Milton's logical analysis of theology based on Scripture, there is a minimum of speculation. *Paradise Lost,* on the contrary, gives equal emphasis to the Bible, the Church Fathers, the Rabbinical commentators, the literary men, and theologians of the Reformation—all of whom furnished rich material for Milton's epic.

There is no definable system of angelology in *Paradise Lost.* But one can draw up a fairly systematized account of the angels

therein: their nature, their spirituality, their knowledge, and their will power. The spirituality of Milton's angels has always been a matter of doubt. To the casual reader, the angels seem to be grossly material; but deeper study reveals their spirituality, not the pure spirituality of the angels in the Thomistic system, but the ethereality of the Augustine angels. Milton's angels seem to have been derived from the theology of St. Augustine, as it was refined by St. Bonaventure and the Franciscan theologians of the thirteenth century.

Milton expressed in the epic the common tradition that angelic knowledge is limited; what the angels know, they know through infusion. Their knowledge can be increased, however, through experience and through new revelation. Many other points Milton accepted from the Scholastics; for example, the traditional hierarchy among the angels, the missions of angels to men, the guardianship of angels, and others so numerous that they would warrant a separate study.

Milton's hierarchy of rebel angels is of the same order as the hierarchy of the loyal angels. Little is said about the rebel angels in the *De Doctrina,* and in *Paradise Lost* there are only uncoördinated details. But again a fairly complete study of the rebel angels can be compiled from those scattered details. In the first place, the dignified nature of Satan, as he first appears in the opening books of *Paradise Lost*, is due as much to Milton's knowledge of theological descriptions as to his knowledge of critical dicta. For theologians agree that there was no radical change in the nature of Satan immediately after his fall; but there was a perversion, so that what effort he had formerly expended in accomplishing good now was expended in hating God and His creatures.

Milton is Scholastic for the most part in his analysis of the sin of Satan and the rebel angels, in his insistence that the demons are not naturally wicked, in his description of their free fixation in evil. With the Scholastics, Milton accepts the traditional ideas that Satan was the highest of the angels and the cause of the others' sin. Further, Milton delineates casually in *Paradise Lost* the dual torment inflicted on the rebel angels: their pain of loss of the vision of God, and their pain of sense. He accepts tradition, much of it Scholastic, in describing more minutely the physical tortures of hell.

This chapter on the rebel angels contains also a somewhat

lengthy discussion on the Scholastic doctrine of the goodness of being versus annihilation. Briefly, that doctrine is as follows: being is better than non-being, for existence is a philosophic good, even though it be an existence full of pain. Another thoroughly Scholastic discussion centers about the possibility of a mitigation in the pains of hell. Milton's conclusions are the same as those of the Scholastics—that God's mercy will preponderate over His justice, and allow some mitigation in the application of punishment but not in the execution of it.

The final chapter contains a brief description of the nature of man before and after his fall. Again, Milton follows expositions of the Scholastics in his delineation of man. Previous to the fall, man was endowed with the supernatural gift of grace, and the preternatural gifts of freedom from death, from pain, and from concupiscence. After the sin of Adam and Eve, they learned the meaning of evil and of death. For the first time they knew lust under the influence of concupiscence; both Aquinas and Milton accepted a tradition found in the Rabbinical commentators that Adam and Eve had had sexual intercourse previous to their sin.

Paradise Lost ends on a theme of apocalyptic happiness. Adam and Eve are given the promise of a Redeemer, which causes Adam to burst forth in lines that are almost self-congratulatory.

Two short matters conclude the dissertation, both of them stemming from the notion of redemption. Milton follows the Scholastics, especially Lombard and St. Bonaventure, in acknowledging that the race of man was created to fill the void left by the fallen angels, and secondly, that the angels were given no hope of redemption because their sin arose from within them, whereas the sin of man was externally derived.

This study, though far from exhaustive, amplifies a statement once written by George Coffin Taylor that scholars should be careful lest they expend too much energy in seeking sources for materials that were commonplaces of the age. Above all, it proves decisively that no source-study of *Paradise Lost* can be complete unless one reckons generously with the Scholastic theologians, who embodied in their *Summae* what later became the commonplace.

VITA

Alfred Henry Deutsch was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on January 9, 1914. He received his elementary school training in the Parochial schools in that city. He was graduated from St. John's Preparatory School at Collegeville, Minnesota, and in 1936 received a Bachelor of Arts degree from St. John's University at Collegeville. In July, 1933, he entered the novitiate of the Order of St. Benedict, and was ordained a priest in June, 1940. After teaching in St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, for one year, he entered the University of Illinois in September, 1941, receiving the degree of Master of Arts in 1942. During his years of study at the University of Illinois, he has served as Assistant Chaplain at the Newman Foundation on the campus of the University.